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SUBJECT: RECENT OFDA NOTES FROM ITURI

Summary

¶11. (U) During a visit to Ituri from July 19 to July 24, OFDA Reps noted improvements in security, both in Bunia town and in rural areas. There remains concern however that the situation remains inherently unstable given that there is no political settlement in place and that various militias remain extremely distrustful of one another. No strong presence of the central transitional government of Kinshasa can yet be felt in Ituri, though Kinshasa has named and sent out a new District Commissioner. The relative calm of recent months has brought a dramatic improvement in humanitarian access, which has in turn highlighted problems in the relationship between MONUC and humanitarian organizations. Though the overall number of IDPs in Ituri is diminishing, little progress has yet been made in reducing the size of the large IDP camp near Bunia airport. END SUMMARY

¶12. (U) OFDA Reps Jay Nash and Ian MacNairn were in Ituri from July 19 to July 24, where they visited Kasenyi, Aru and Ariwara in addition to Bunia and met with both humanitarian staff and militiamen.

Security

¶13. (U) At the time of OFDA Rep Nash's last visit to Bunia in mid May, the town was still experiencing frequent shootings and armed robberies at night. In July, security was reported to have improved considerably. OFDA Reps were told by Bunia residents that militiamen of various types could be seen walking around with barely concealed weapons in peripheral areas at night, but people nevertheless generally felt that that town was much less dangerous than it had been at any time over the past year.

¶14. (U) Though certainly partially attributable to increased MONUC foot patrols at night in the town, the improvement in security in Bunia is no doubt also due to a general decrease in inter-ethnic tension resulting from a decrease in incidents of inter-ethnic violence in rural areas outside Bunia. During daytime hours, the town continues to grow more cosmopolitan and tolerant, with people of various ethnicity feeling increasingly comfortable walking into neighborhoods known to be dominated by members of one or another ethnic group. Though people still largely stay close to their "home" neighborhoods at night, these also are slowly becoming less mono-ethnic. Somewhat surprisingly, there are now some Hema families living in Nyambi - the area south of MONUC headquarters that has been nearly exclusively all non-Hema, non-Gegere for the past year. Some Nande traders from North Kivu have started reestablishing their businesses in Bunia, and their trucks have begun arriving from Beni. Gold trading has resumed, and there is again considerable foot traffic between Bunia and Mongbwalu, where the gold is mined. As people involved in the gold trade must walk through the Gegere-dominated Mudziipela northern part of Bunia as well as Lendu areas on the way to Mongbwalu, this traffic itself is a sign of increasing tolerance and decreasing tension.

¶15. (U) Outside Bunia, the trend in Ituri which started

in December of 2003 of rural areas settling into distinct, but relatively peaceful "zones of control" - all completely outside MONUC's influence - has continued. With the exception of the Hema pockets of Boga, Kasenyi, Tshomia and Sota, the area south of Bunia is under Ngiti control, with many Bira (who have no militia) also present. The "central" area just north of Bunia is controlled by the Gegere-dominant Union des Patriotes Congolais (UPC) militia. Between the UPC area and Mahagi, and to the west of Bunia, Lendu militias are in charge. From Mahagi northward, Jerome Kakwau's FAPC militia has authority. Though (with the exception of Jerome's area), these zones are generally less ethnically diverse than they were before hostilities began in 1999, none are completely mono-ethnic and during the daytime there is considerable freedom of movement between zones for persons of various ethnicity. Completely outside the framework of various MONUC and Ituri Interim Administration peace efforts, a number of communities of different ethnicity have made their own "peace" arrangements in the interest of reviving agricultural trade. Among civilians, it is not uncommon to hear people of various groups even state with confidence that "the ethnic war is over."

16. (U) Though the relative calm has held for eight months now, many observers in Bunia still feel that the situation is inherently unstable and that in reality a permanent solution for Ituri is no closer than it was a year ago. Many suspect that the UPC of Thomas Lubanga, at least, still has a political agenda which would include minimally control of the city of Bunia, and possibly much more. The only thing currently preventing the UPC from attempting to make territorial advances is believed to be the threat of a MONUC response. Though "working arrangements" between militias may exist, it would be a gross overstatement to say that militiamen, or especially their leaders, have come to trust each other and join in the popular belief that the war may be over. In mid July, FAPC and Lendu militiamen skirmished for a couple of weeks in areas between Mahagi and Djugu, reportedly over access to "taxes" on trade. In this case, MONUC was able to successfully negotiate a ceasefire with the two factions involved, and to prevent the conflict spreading to larger contingents of the same militias present in Mahagi itself. Flare ups of this sort would, however, seem to be inevitable with so many boundaries in place and so much at stake in terms of trade revenue. Any minor incident could conceivably spread quickly into a larger breakdown of order that MONUC might find very difficult to control.

17. (U) The central fact remains that none of the militia leaders are solidly implicated in any overall new political order planned for Ituri. In the past year, MONUC has failed entirely to arrange a political settlement that could serve as the basis for a scheduled dismantling of militias and separate administrations, the reintegration of populations and the return of central authority. The MONUC-supported "Interim Administration" (IA) never succeeded in gaining effective politico-administrative control of any part of Ituri, including even the town of Bunia itself. The IA has now been replaced by the administration of Petronille Vaweka, the new District Commissioner, appointed by the transitional government in Kinshasa. Though generally respected as a courageous and strong leader, Vaweka still has no police or army with which to impose governmental authority anywhere. The "Ituri Brigade" of the new, integrated national army is just beginning to deploy to Ituri, and at least part of this force is currently occupied trying to contain territorial advances by dissident general Laurent Nkunda operating out of the Kalehe area in South Kivu.

18. (U) Though Iturians of all factions, as well as MONUC officials, have been appealing loudly for greater Kinshasa government involvement in Ituri since the Ugandans left in May of 2003, observers more familiar with the situation outside Ituri - i.e. with the current state of the transitional government and the degree of readiness of the new army - tend to be less sure that a greater transitional government presence in Ituri will automatically make for a huge improvement in the overall situation, especially if the government is not in a position to strongly support (with, for example, timely payment of salaries) those that are sent there. It is no doubt the case that in their strong desire to see a return of Kinshasa to Ituri, the Iturians are to some degree remembering a time when Kinshasa was able to impose order in the region, and do not fully realize to what extent today's central government is significantly weaker than that of an earlier Mobutu era.

Humanitarian access and relations between MONUC and the
humanitarians

¶19. (U) The relative calm that has come to Ituri has also brought a dramatic improvement in terms of humanitarian access, and with it something of a strategy dilemma for humanitarian agencies. While the humanitarians' credibility in the region can be said to have gone up as a result of their persistent efforts to reach and assist populations in need during the crisis, MONUC's credibility, never particularly great, has fallen through the floor, with MONUC now distrusted and despised by all the Ituri militia groups. MONUC is resented both because whenever it imposes its authority it decreases the power of the militias, and because it is perceived to have made many promises that have not been kept, particularly with regard to the supplying of food and other benefits to promised sites of demobilization.

¶10. (U) On the other hand, the militias, eager to have their populations obtain access to humanitarian assistance and anxious to show the outside world that they are not barbarians, but are instead capable of providing order and security within the territories they control, have grown more and more cooperative to humanitarians. Humanitarians who make the effort to disassociate themselves with MONUC and contact the various militia leaders on their own to negotiate access can now move around relatively securely nearly anywhere in Ituri. In contrast, MONUC cannot safely go more than a few kilometers outside Bunia town without armed guards, and MONUC personnel tend to be coldly received wherever they travel.

¶11. (U) Among the international NGOs present in Ituri, German Agro Action (GAA) has so far gone the farthest in exploiting the new opportunities to reach rural populations. Using a well-developed network of contacts, and establishing a transparent relationship of trust simultaneously with all the different militias in the region, GAA can now travel pretty much anywhere in Ituri where there is a road after making just a few preliminary telephone calls. On various visits, OFDA Rep has accompanied GAA staff to meet with leaders of all the major militias, and in every instance the leaders have complimented GAA on their initiative in reaching their communities and communicated the same message: other humanitarians are also more than welcome as long as they remain neutral and apolitical, and as long as they do not bring MONUC with them.

¶12. (U) MONUC has never enjoyed good relations with the humanitarian agencies present in Ituri. The humanitarians have long felt that MONUC, in addition to being a weak and largely ineffective military force, has generally manifested a poor intelligence capacity and a poor understanding of the situation. As a result, they feel that MONUC has frequently misread the context on the ground, sometimes with catastrophic consequences. MONUC personnel appear to the humanitarians to exude arrogance and paternalism, and the humanitarians feel that information they provide to MONUC rarely receives the attention it deserves.

¶13. (U) The humanitarians also resent what they perceive as an effort to make them all fall under MONUC's overall authority. Though the humanitarians readily acknowledge the necessity of the presence of a large international force, and though all ultimately have depended on MONUC for security whenever there has been open fighting in Bunia, they are keenly aware of the extent to which MONUC is disliked and distrusted by all the armed groups controlling the rural areas of the region, and would consequently like to maintain an independent identity and disassociate themselves with MONUC to the extent possible. As UNOCHA staff told OFDA reps on this visit, "if you travel with MONUC, you will not be well received." MONUC, however, puts considerable pressure on all international organizations not to go anywhere outside Bunia without an armed MONUC escort. With the exception of GAA, none of the INGOs have sufficiently large networks of contacts, or are sufficiently self-confident, to be willing to take responsibility for their own security by refusing the MONUC escorts. (In the case of the UN Agencies, refusal is probably not even an option, given that the SRSR has authority not just over MONUC but over the entire UN team in DRC.)

¶14. (U) An important aspect of the problem is that the humanitarians see their mandate as quite distinct from that of MONUC. It is clear that MONUC has been given a

political task in addition to its security function: it is supposed to be bringing the armed groups in Ituri together into a peace process. This inevitably means using pressure at times to get the leaders of armed groups to agree to things they may not necessarily want to or like, and pressure always risks provoking the disfavor of those who may feel that they are being coerced. The humanitarians, on the other hand, see their role as to remain apolitical and to provide assistance to those suffering the consequences of the conflict, regardless of the success or failure of various political initiatives. To obtain and maintain access to vulnerable populations, the humanitarians feel that the militias must perceive them as being completely neutral. This implies being viewed as separate and different from MONUC, since the militiamen often doubt MONUC's neutrality. Moreover, the humanitarians are very aware that association with highly unpopular MONUC might on any given day have hugely undesirable consequences in terms of INGO personnel safety.

¶15. (U) The difference in mandate does not appear to be completely appreciated by MONUC. The MONUC headquarters in Bunia has made it clear to the humanitarians present in Ituri that it does not approve of INGOs having independent relations with the armed groups. According to the humanitarians, the MONUC administration's view is that to successfully exert influence over the armed groups, the international community, including its humanitarian representatives, must be strongly cohesive and must always present a common front (with MONUC, it is assumed, setting the course and leading the way). As these two perspectives are largely incompatible, every INGO attempting to work in Ituri finds itself frequently having to make difficult choices as to how to manage the relationship.

¶16. (U) The question of INGO independence from MONUC can be expected to get even more difficult to manage in the near future as MONUC embarks on its joint disarmament/reintegration program with PNUD. There has already been at least one small crisis. USAID/OFDA and GAA had agreed on a project to rehabilitate the Bogoro-Aveba road as a food-security initiative long before Aveba was selected by MONUC as a site for one of its new planned militia disarmament-demobilization camps. GAA had already discussed with the Ngiti communities along the road how the project would proceed, using the community-based approach that it found so successful on the Bunia-Kasenyei road, when MONUC, in a hurry to have the road fully operational so as to be able to readily ship supplies down to its future demobilization camp site, began pressuring GAA for a faster and more heavy-machinery-dependent approach. Though some use of MONUC heavy equipment assets had always been planned, GAA had promised the communities to use local youth to do the work wherever possible, thereby providing the communities valuable employment opportunities. MONUC now wanted to send their engineers and heavy equipment down immediately, and worse, planned to send them with an armed escort. As MONUC was in serious disfavor with Ngiti groups at the time, having just arrested an important Ngiti leader, GAA was extremely concerned about appearances and the potential association of their team with MONUC soldiers (whose behavior GAA would not be able to control). In the end, GAA was able to arrange that the MONUC road crew go without an armed escort while simultaneously quelling Ngiti fears of a MONUC invasion of their territory and a possible abduction of another of their leaders. GAA is nevertheless concerned that the road project has now been irreversibly linked to in the minds of the Ngiti to MONUC's disarmament program, which they fear may eventually be viewed highly negatively by the communities.

Disarmament

¶17. (U) The humanitarian community in both Bunia and in Kinshasa continues to have deep reservations with regard to the appropriateness and quality of the disarmament/reintegration plan that MONUC and UNDP have adopted for the Ituri region. In particular, they question the wisdom of embarking on any type of militia cantonment program before any viable political process is in place and seen to be moving forward. They especially question the validity of a cantonment plan such as the present one in which MONUC will not be guaranteeing security at the sites and where it is as yet unclear that the transitional government is ready to receive some of the militiamen as candidates for the new army and transfer them out of Ituri. In addition, there continues to be disagreement regarding whether

the militias are ready and willing to disarm. MONUC and UNDP insist that they have commitments from the armed groups. Most others remaining skeptical that these commitments are sincere, given the lack of any accepted political settlement to Ituri's problems and communities' persisting fears that they could be attack by their enemies. Finally, there is disagreement even as to whether disarmament is an attainable and reasonable goal in Ituri, given the proximity of the district to abundant arms supplies in Sudan and Uganda. Some would argue that the emphasis should rather be on creating sufficient security and stability through a new political order so as to make the arms unnecessary and relatively valueless rather than on simply implementing an arms reduction program.

¶18. (U) OFDA Rep's own conversations with militia commanders tend to substantiate skepticism with regard to the Ituri demobilization program. In a conversation on this trip, FAPC commander General Jerome Kakwatu told OFDA Rep that he did not feel that this disarmament/demobilization process had anything to do with his forces, since the FAPC considered itself part of the transitional government and was only waiting for the procedures to be put in place to confirm their reintegration with the new national army. With the exception of child soldiers, he did not see demobilization as being in the cards and warned that any attempt to forcefully disarm his men would be resisted with force. In a meeting during a previous trip, Commander Linganga, the second in charge of the UPC command after Bosco, told OFDA Rep that they were willing to negotiate reintegration with the national army with the Kinshasa government, but would never disarm to MONUC. In still other conversations, Commanders Germain (leader of the Ngiti militia) and Chief Kahwa (leader of the main Hema-South militia) expressed continuing high levels of distrust of UPC, suggesting they did not feel they were yet in a position to be able to let down their defenses.

¶19. (U) The humanitarian community's reservations regarding the proposed disarmament program have been expressed repeatedly since November 2003 when the document first surfaced, but appear to have had little effect on the MONUC/UNDP plans. September 1 has now been set as the opening date for the cantonment sites. (Though MONUC has started work on preparing the actual sites, few observers think that these will in fact be ready in the time frame specified and thus expect that the date will have to be pushed packed yet again). At this point, the humanitarian community has given up resistance and is just hoping that the program will not be the large-scale fiasco that many are afraid it could be. Few think that the program has much chance of success in doing anything to defuse the long-term threat of violence in Ituri. Many think it has the potential to create new problems as MONUC will inevitably be unable to meet all the militiamen's expectations of the program.

Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)

¶20. (U) The IDP situation has greatly improved in Ituri, with more and more people able to return to their villages as a result of the relative calm that has reigned for the past eight months. On a field trip into Lendu areas northwest of Bunia, OFDA reps saw many houses under construction, and MONUC has reported a major return of Gegere to the Fataki area. Return is still problematic, however, for minority communities desiring to return to areas controlled by the militia of another ethnic group. MONUC tried unsuccessfully, for example, to negotiate with Lendu and Ngiti leaders the return of former Hema residents of Bogoro, but were told that "it was not yet time." As Ituri originally had a very "speckled" ethnic make up, this problem minimally affects tens of thousands of people.

¶21. (U) The IDP camp near the airport is reportedly down to an estimated 13,000 residents from a peak of 15,000 last year, but movement out of the camp continues to be very slow. Approximately two-thirds of camp residents are registered as being from the town of Bunia itself. Several months ago, the thinking was that these people did not return home because a large number of houses had been destroyed or were now occupied by squatters. Recent investigations conducted by INGO Atlas Logistic in several neighborhoods in Bunia, however, show clearly that this is not a problem in the vast majority of cases. Given recent improvements in the security situation, danger would also not seem to be a valid justification for remaining in the camp. It is now suspected that many camp

residents continue to stay there simply because in the camp they have access to free food, free shelter and free education. Those who own houses in the town can also make some money by renting out their homes. Despite offers of returnee packages to those who volunteer to leave the camp, the incentives still seem to fall more heavily on the side of staying. Atlas Logistique and others are currently considering alternative strategies that might enjoy more success in encouraging a departure from the camp for those who could safely return to their homes.

visit to Aru and Ariwara

122. (U) To obtain a perspective on the mid-July fighting near Mahagi between Lendu militia and FAPC forces, as well as a sense as to whether further population displacements might be expected in the future in that area, OFDA Reps traveled briefly to Aru in northern Ituri, where they were invited to meet with General Jerome 40 km further north in Ariwara. The young general was gracious and cordial throughout. He praised USAID/OFDA partner German Agro Action for its work in the Aru-Mahagi area and assured OFDA Reps that other agencies would be most welcome to come to Aru. He guaranteed that humanitarians would be able to move about freely and in total security within all FAPC-controlled areas. While dismissing the Mahagi incidents as minor and stating that he believed the problems between the groups had been satisfactorily resolved, he confirmed that if FAPC positions were attacked again, they would again retaliate.

123. (U) General Jerome took advantage of the opportunity to discuss other subjects of concern to him. He categorically denied the rumors that he had any connection with the insurgency of General Laurant Nkunda in South Kivu, emphasizing that he was Congolese, had served long in the Congolese army, and had no allegiances elsewhere. When asked whether he was at all optimistic about the future, he replied that he was not, given that he had been given reassurances by Kinshasa authorities that he and his administration would be integrated into the transitional government but that many weeks had since passed and there had been no noticeable progress. He was now wondering whether the TG had really negotiated in good faith. He urged the USAID delegation to encourage the USG to exert pressure, through the Ambassador's role as a member of the CIAT, to move more quickly on integration of the army and administration. He said that the FAPC was open to Kinshasa's appointment of new authorities to the Aru-Mahagi area, but felt that before doing so, Kinshasa should examine the performance of the FAPC appointees presently in place and either decide to retain them or find appropriate new appointments for them elsewhere, since in his estimation they had been doing an excellent job. The general commented that he did not himself feel that his future was necessarily tied to that of the Ituri region, since he was not himself an Iturian.

124. (U) The general highlighted the multi-ethnic composition of his military and civil administration and pointed out that the Aru area, under FAPC direction, remained extremely orderly and was an economic success. The FAPC had made Aru a place, he said, where business and development could be conducted in a completely secure environment. With regards to demobilization, Jerome said that though the FAPC would certainly be willing to demobilize any child soldiers in its ranks, everyone else should be absorbed into the new Congolese army. If it was determined that some candidates were too old to continue service, or not sufficiently fit, they should be provided transportation back to their home areas and given a retirement package as part of their demobilization.

125. (U) Back in Aru, after the meeting with General Jerome in Ariwara, a close aid to the general rather passionately expressed his personal view that it would be a mistake to classify Jerome as having much in common with such dissident Tutsi commanders as Mutebusi and Nkunda. The aide claimed to have grown up in the Goma area with both Jerome and Nkunda, and to know them both well. While he was clearly a fan of Jerome, the aide viewed Nkunda as extremely "arrogant," and was sure that Nkunda's Bukavu intervention had been largely planned by General Bora, whom he believed was trying to use some territorial acquisitions in South Kivu as leverage to negotiate amnesty and acceptable high-level positions for himself and Nkunda in the TG. According to the aide, Bora and Nkunda had been counting on Vice-President Ruberwa to support their bid, and that the

plan had fallen apart when this did not happen. MEECE.